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ENZI PAYS TRIBUTE TO SENATOR KENNEDY'S WORK PASSING GENETIC
NON-DISCRIMINATION BILL, S.306

Washington, D.C. - U.S. Senator Mike Enzi, R-WY, Chairman of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee (HELP Committee), today hailed passage of the "Genetic Nondiscrimination Act of 2005," S.306, a bill to prohibit discrimination in health insurance and employment, and paid tribute to the pivotal support and cooperation provided by Senator Ted Kennedy (D-MA), Ranking Member of the HELP Committee.

"Senator Kennedy has done a remarkable job of encouraging cooperation to work across the aisle and speed passage of this bill. As a Committee and a legislative body, we have taken an important step forward in preventative medicine that will save lives and reduce health care costs down the road," Enzi said. "We simply could not have reached this week's milestone without the institutional memory and cooperation of Senator Kennedy. He has helped guide this effort and has played a vital role in securing unanimous passage of this important bill."

As passed by the Senate, S.306 will establish clear guidance for health insurers and employers about the use and disclosure of genetic information. Over half of the states currently have laws governing genetic information. However, they differ in terms of how genetic information is handled and used by insurers and employers. Enzi said both employers and insurers will be better served if federal law establishes clear and consistent rules regarding the disclosure and use of genetic information, as required under S.306.

"Advances in genetic science are transforming our fight against deadly inherited diseases. But fear of discrimination by health insurers and employers on the basis of predictive genetic information can deter individuals from taking advantage of these life-saving genetic tests and therapies," Enzi said.

"Questions about the current scope of genetic information protection invite, not discourage, litigation," Enzi added. "We are far better off setting clear, consistent rules now, rather than allowing courts to set them piecemeal through litigation. The time to save lives is now. The time to save future health care costs is now."

By fully protecting the privacy of genetic information and encouraging individuals to take full advantage of genetic screening, counseling, and testing, new therapies will be developed, Enzi predicted.

"I look forward to working with Senator Kennedy on range of additional issues during the coming year," Enzi concluded.